

San Diego County Water Authority Comments Regarding the San Diego County Grand Jury 1999-2000 Report, "Fluoridation of San Diego County Water Supply"

Recommendation 00-50

"That the San Diego County Water Authority explore, with the Metropolitan Water District, the feasibility of fluoridating the water prior to receipt. "

Comment

The San Diego County Water Authority and its member agencies provide water to about 98 percent of the county's residents through a system that is complex, institutionally as well as physically. As the San Diego region's water wholesaler, the Authority imports water into the county through the Metropolitan Water District and provides it to 23 member agencies. Historically, the Authority has maintained a neutral position on "local control" issues in which it does not play a direct role. For example, the Authority does not treat water; therefore, the Authority is neutral on the issue of drinking water fluoridation. The member agencies, which provide water directly to consumers and treat about half of the water used in the region, properly make such decisions. The member agencies are divided on the issue of fluoridation.

The system that delivers water to San Diego County residents is complicated in a physical sense as well. In fiscal year 1998-99, water use in the Authority service area totaled 619,409 acre-feet. Of that amount, 466,884 acre-feet (75 percent) were delivered by the Water Authority to its member agencies. The remaining 152,525 acre-feet were local in origin, from reservoirs, wells and recycling projects.

Approximately half of the imported water is treated by Metropolitan at Lake Skinner, in southern Riverside County, and delivered by the Authority to 10 member agencies. The rest of the water is delivered raw to nine member agencies and one non-member, which treat it in their own facilities or in facilities they share with other agencies. Four member agencies have no direct connection to the Authority and receive all of their water from neighboring agencies.

All of the member agencies except one share pipeline connections with one or more of their neighboring agencies. Most of these "interconnections" are used during emergencies and some are used routinely. The one member agency that does not have any interconnections, the Yuima Municipal Water District, gets most of its water from local groundwater sources. As a result, none of the member agencies exclusively serve water that has been treated only by Metropolitan.

Thus, even if all of San Diego County's *imported* water supply was fluoridated at Metropolitan's Lake Skinner treatment plant, this step would not result in the fluoridation of the county's total water supply. Fluoridation would have to occur at Lake Skinner as well as at all of the treatment plants and wellheads in the county. Accordingly, the economic advantage cited in the Grand Jury report of fluoridating at Lake Skinner would not be realized. Moreover, it would be difficult to achieve an even level of fluoridation of all drinking water, given that some member agencies treat their own water and others purchase water that has been treated by either Metropolitan and/or another agency.